

# ANARCHIST STUDY GROUPS

📖 First Edition, 2001 📖

Tuesday Study Group, The Long Haul Infoshop  
3124 Shattuck Ave., Berkeley CA 94705

## Logistics: The Chicken or the Egg?

A major issue about getting started is whether to get a group together and then decide how it will run or to come up with an ideal form and then advertise for participants. You may have enough friends and acquaintances to start a group by word of mouth. If you don't have many local anarchist contacts, you may have to advertise first.

- Get people interested. Flyers, posted in community centers and independent bookstores, are often effective, especially if they include a contact number.
- Find a space. Free spaces are generally better than paid spaces like cafes or restaurants. Also, public spaces (as opposed to somebody's house) often make it possible for people you don't already know to attend. Libraries, parks, and community centers are ideal locations.
- Decide how often to meet. Our group meets weekly and either tackles small readings per week or discusses larger texts over a period of several meetings. Other groups meet monthly to discuss one book, like an anarchist Book-Of-The-Month club. Do keep in mind that a regular meeting place and time makes possible the inclusion of drop-in or occasional participants.
- Keep people interested (including yourself). Bringing snacks now and then seems to make people happy. Special treats like film nights can cure a rut, especially after a long text. Most importantly, remember that challenging and respectful discussions are what it's all about, not increasing membership or indoctrinating the masses. When people enjoy the work that goes on in study groups, they'll usually keep coming back.

We hope that this pamphlet has inspired you to consider study groups as an educational tool. We wish you the best of luck.



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## About Us

The Tuesday Night Study Group explores and analyzes the diversity of anarchist theories in order to deepen our understanding of them. A consciously egalitarian group, we use the format of an open dialog to encourage a reciprocal exchange of opinion and analysis.

With this pamphlet, we hope to inspire others to form their own such groups in order to develop an enriched consciousness of the meaning of the theory and practice of anarchic freedom. As anarchist study groups germinate, so does the possibility for clear action coming from clear thought. Learning anarchist theory and history builds a sense of continuity by enabling us to move beyond ideological dead-ends.

The study group also provides a place for participants to connect with a regularly meeting anarchist circle. Part of our social lives, it has contributed to our making connections which have in turn led to our individual involvement in diverse efforts and actions. Regular interaction also encourages the development of participants' abilities to articulate and promote a political position from a foundation of knowledge.

The study group began as an anarchist history class as part of the former Berkeley Free Skool. We picked topics in history and studied the anarchist contribution, after reading up to 30 pages of photocopied material. Subjects included the First International, the Paris Commune, the Russian Revolution, the Makhnovist movement, and the Spanish Civil War. Today the group meets once a week to discuss readings that prompt us to examine developments in contemporary anarchist theory. We have looked at material that isn't strictly anarchist, from game theory to feminist psychology, from the Situationist International to *Fight Club*. By not restricting ourselves to anarchist texts, we are able to take insights and inspiration from writers who are broadly anti-authoritarian, even if we disagree with their conclusions. We are committed to exploring issues in anarchist theory and practice from a critical--rather than ideological--perspective. While participants have individual leanings and preferences, we try not to be wedded to the ideological constraints of any particular brand of anarchism. We don't refuse to read texts by people we disagree with; likewise, we are not afraid to find things we disagree with in texts we like. In other words, we rake everyone over the coals equally.

## What We Read...

Our informal method of choosing topics and materials basically consists of a participant proposing a topic or source, and if there's a general group interest, we go with it. Any individual not interested in the topic at all can choose to either deal with it or skip the discussion. There are a few ways to approach a new text, including: selecting the best and worst aspects of the text, finding something a person agrees with or disagrees with, and/or simply analyzing the text page by page. It helps if someone in the group has some background on the subject and can filter it to others if the material itself isn't clear enough. Unclear material often causes our group to lose interest and either wrap the discussion up quickly or (occasionally) abandon the text altogether.

## ...& How We Read It

Because of our emphasis on critical thinking and our aversion to ideology, our group is a study group rather than a propaganda group. The difference is that we foster thinking about anarchy in creative, critical, conscious ways. A propaganda group, while engaging in outreach in attempts to increase membership, impresses the ideas of its main theoreticians on members with the intent of having those ideas accepted uncritically. We engage in critical thinking by considering fact vs. opinion, knowing the author's standpoint, finding contradictions in the given information, and questioning assumptions (either the author's or our own). Because an atmosphere without fear of humiliation is important for open debate and honest criticism, we're conscious to take turns, listen to others, focus on the matter at hand, and manage the tangents that inevitably occur.

## Facilitation

The facilitator's job is to remind people of the focus of discussion, encourage quiet people to participate, and prevent monopolies by vocal individuals. If appropriately carried out, facilitation functions to prevent hierarchical situations and can itself only be hierarchical if its goals are perverted. The formality of facilitation can vary with the size of the group; that is, a larger group may need defined methods of choosing facilitators and ensuring that everyone gets a chance to speak.